

WAKEFIELD SHOPPING CENTER
1309-21 Court House Road
Arlington
Virginia

HABS VA-1279
VA-1279

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WAKEFIELD SHOPPING CENTER

HABS No. VA-1279

Location: 1309-21 Court House Road, Arlington, Arlington County, Virginia. The shopping center was demolished in spring 1990.

Significance: Built to serve the Mihran Mesrobian designed Wakefield Manor apartments (1943), the Wakefield Shopping Center fell under the planning aegis that paired apartment complexes with low-scale commercial centers in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The garden apartment concept oriented the apartment buildings inward, toward a courtyard, effectively eliminating street frontage. The hope was to offer pleasant views and to bring light into each unit. The garden apartment was one design solution for permanent, cost-efficient, and affordable housing that was built from the mid-1930s to the mid 1950s. In this time period, Arlington saw 176 apartment buildings and complexes go up in the county; the first was Colonial Village (b. 1935) and many, including Wakefield, were underway by the early 1940s.

Description: The shopping center was a one-story row of storefronts along Court House Road. It was constructed of brick and punctuated by plate glass windows and ornamented with art deco design elements, from the brick pylon between stores (at No. 1317) to the grates, pilasters, and door surrounds.

History: During the 1930s a steady influx of people moved to Washington, D.C., and environs as part of the burgeoning federal government, working in New Deal programs and later in defense related industries in preparation for war. Arlington County was no exception. In this decade some 40 % of Arlingtonians would be employed in public service; many were commuters. As a result, residential and commercial construction projects abounded, especially in the suburbs and included a myriad of apartment complexes and what would become the neighborhood shopping center. The shopping center could be an independent venture, located near a residential community, or be part of the planned development. Such duality of purpose was encouraged by the Federal Housing Administration, the agency insuring many of the apartment buildings and complexes. Unlike a downtown Main Street, the neighborhood shopping centers clustered between seven to twenty tenants in one structure and offered off-street parking.¹

¹ See Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-41," *Journal of the Society for Architectural Historians* 51 (March 1992): 5-34; Laura Trieschmann and Carrie Albee, "Glebe Center," Nomination July 2003, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, who cite Carl B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County Virginia: A History* (Baltimore: Port City Press, Inc., 1976), 247-48.

Automobile culture defined the design for the shopping centers, assuring the presence of a parking forecourt that occupied a significant portion of the lot with one or more rows of diagonal spaces. The low-scale shopping centers were generally one story in height. The individual retail stores were contiguous to one another, each fronting on the parking lot. All of the stores had an entrance accessed directly from the lot.²

Following Arthur B. Heaton's (1930) *Park and Shop* on Connecticut Avenue were another twenty-five or so neighborhood shopping centers erected throughout the D.C. suburbs up until the United States' entry into the Second World War in 1941. The innovative *Park and Shop* served as the model for these shopping centers, both in D.C. and throughout the country as a whole, as the type emerged during the 1930s. At least eleven neighborhood shopping centers of this genre were constructed in Arlington County before the war. In fact, by 1941, neighborhood shopping centers appeared on almost every major thoroughfare in the county.

The Wakefield Shopping Center followed shortly thereafter. In 1943 Wakefield Manor, one of architect Mihran Mesrobian's apartment complexes in Arlington, was built and in 1945 the first building permit on file for the shopping center was issued. The permit (#18841) was submitted for "masonry stores" at 1309-17 North Court House Road, indicating work on part of the shopping center. The owner listed at the time was Parreco and Von Herbulis, although the following year for the construction of the stores at Nos. 1319-21, the company was cited on the permit (#19111) as the builder. William Parreco was the owner. Successive permits between 1957 and 1983 reflect maintenance, such as roof work, build-outs for new tenants, as in the 1968 remodeling for the beauty salon, and repairs after a truck collided with a storefront in 1973. Yet the earliest permit (#14810) associated with the site is dated February 1942, and it was filed for the erection of a brick and concrete block office at Nos. 1317-21. The owner at the time was F.A. Gosnell, and the builder listed was J.R. Gosnell.³

² Longstreth, 11.

³ Records of the Arlington County Building Department, Building Permits, Virginia Room, Arlington County Public Library (microfilm)/ "House Numbers and Street Names" Cards, on file, Arlington County Historic Preservation Division. The roof was redone in 1982 by NW Martin Co.; the earlier permit (#5061) from 1965 called for the removal of the present roof and installation of new insulation, roofing, and flashing.

Sources:

Leach, Sara Amy. "Mihran Mesrobian's Suburban Virginia Garden Apartments and Shopping Centers." Paper presented at Beyond the Mall, Washington, D.C., December 1994.

Longstreth, Richard. "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-41." *Journal of the Society for Architectural Historians* 51 (March 1992): 5-34.

Rose, Carl B., Jr. *Arlington County Virginia: A History*. Baltimore: Port City Press, Inc., 1976.

Trieschmann, Laura and Carrie Albee, "Glebe Center," Nomination July 2003, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WAKEFIELD SHOPPING CENTER

This report is an addendum to a three-page report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

- Location: 1309-21 North Court House Road, Arlington, Arlington County, Virginia.
- Present Owner: Arlington Courthouse Limited Partnership.
- Present Use: Neighborhood Shopping Center.
- Significance: The Wakefield Shopping Center is one of the few remaining commercial structures erected in the 1940s in the Fort Myers subdivision of Arlington County. Designed by noteworthy local architect Mihran Mesrobian with Eastern motifs, the shopping center served and to a lesser degree continues to serve residents of the nearby garden apartment complexes.
- Historian: Estella K. Bryans-Munson, Spring 1990.
- Project Information: This documentation project was coordinated by the Arlington Heritage Alliance Inc. with the sponsorship of the Bell Atlantic Charitable Foundation to mitigate the impending loss of several historic Arlington County buildings. Estella K. Bryans-Munson served as the project historian and John C. Schwartz as the large-format photographer in the spring 1990.

PART I. Historical Information

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1946.
2. Architect: Attributed to Mihran Mesrobian.¹
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following chain of title is for lots 11, 12, and 13, in block 14 of Fort Myer Heights from 1942 to 1990.²

¹ For information pertaining to Mesrobian's architectural practice – or at least examples of his work – see James Goode's *Best Addresses*.

² The documents for the chain of title were obtained from the county land records in the Clerk of the Court's Office.

December 31, 1942. Fred A. and Sue Gosnell to Walter O. Von Herbulis. Deed Book 626, p. 173.

September 25, 1946. Walter O. and Ellen R. Von Herbulis, William and Emma Parreco to Wakefield Shopping Center, Inc. Deed Book 1020, p. 600.

October 31, 1986. Wakefield Shopping Center, Inc., to Arlington Courthouse Limited Partnership. Deed Book 2243, p. 173.

4. Builder: William Parreco and Walter Von Herbulis.³
5. Original plans and construction: None have been located, nor have any descriptions of the initial construction and appearance of the shopping center been found.
6. Alterations and additions: The county's building permit files record several changes to the shopping center over time:

September 10, 1957, Permit No. 32889 for the installation of a telephone booth.

August 10, 1965, Permit No. 21257 for the installation of a condensing unit on the roof and a blower-cooling coil in the rear of No. 1309.

September 21, 1965, Permit No. 5001 for the removal of the roof and insulation and the installation of new insulation and a B.V. roof with flash projection.

January 23, 1968, Permit No. 27542 to enclose an existing open stairway.

January 25, 1968, Permit No. 27529 for the remodeling of the beauty salon.

May 9, 1973, Permit No. 6150 to repair the storefront that was damaged by a truck, including the installation of new show windows on the right and left sides (new glass on right side), repairing the damaged masonry on the right side, the installation of new cast-stone facing, the replacement of the existing entrance door with an aluminum and glass assembly, repairing the plaster inside as necessary, and painting.

August 5, 1982, Permit No. 2045 to re-roof Nos. 1311, 1313, and 1315, by the N.W. Martin Company.

November 16, 1983, Permit No. 8696-C for the installation of wiring in Nos. 1309-23.

³ See Building Permit No. 18841 issued December 8, 1945.

B. Historical Context

The Wakefield Shopping Center was constructed immediately after the Second World War, a time when the county was experiencing tremendous growth and its population doubled. The effects of the demographic explosion in the county are especially evident in the built environment in and around Clarendon's business district. The district is located approximately one mile from Fort Myer Heights and contains both residential and commercial structures, although all are dwarfed by the Arlington County Court House. The original courthouse was built in 1898, added to in the 1950s, and replaced in 1960-61. The Wakefield Shopping Center is one of the few structures remaining that hosts small businesses and services in the vicinity of the area residents many of whom live in nearby garden apartments.

The Wakefield Shopping Center has retained many of the same type of tenants since its construction in 1946. According to the 1955 *Hill's Arlington County (Virginia) Directory* tenants then included two laundries, a typewriter service (No. 1313), Arlington Florist (No. 1315), Court House DGS Market (No. 1317), Professional Barber Shop (No. 1319), and Court House Pharmacy (No. 1321). Similarly, in March 1990, the following businesses occupied the various storefronts: No. 1321, Brown Bag Luncheonette; No. 1319, Professional Hair Cutters; No. 1317, Gene's Grocery and Deli; No. 1315, Sweeney Todd Unisex Hair Design; No. 1313, Laundromat; No. 1311, Atilla's Carry Out; and No. 1309, P&T Office Equipment. The storefront at No. 1325 was vacant.

The importance of the Wakefield Shopping Center lies in its increasingly rare architectural type and scale. Shopping centers like Wakefield that accompanied – and accommodated – the nearby garden apartment complexes are no longer built in Arlington. Most of the commercial structures in Fort Myer Heights were built before 1950, as Wakefield was, and most were only one or two stories in height. Beginning in the 1980s, when redevelopment of the area took off, new construction consisted primarily of multi-story office blocks, such as the 1989 courthouse and SRA building. These fundamentally altered the character of the neighborhood. Also in this period, the small roadside centers with minimal parking were usurped or overshadowed, and then replaced, by the larger, regional shopping hubs in Seven Corners and Tyson's Corner and by full-service "supermarkets."

PART II. Architectural Information

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This one-story strip commercial center is built of brick and concrete block. It consists of seven storefronts and one alley. Much of the trim, such as the cast-concrete pilasters and decorative grillwork, employs Assyrian motifs. Two structures attached to the north end of the building (Nos. 1323 and 1327) appear to be of later construction and are not included in this description. The center is actually two buildings with a

narrow (ca. 5' wide) alley in-between. The alley is closed off with an iron security gate.

2. Condition of fabric: Fair to good, however, portions of the brick facing of No. 1319 have been removed or have fallen off. It appears that the upper cornice has been removed or altered. The cast-concrete elements of the building have not weathered well and appear to be disconnected in some places.

B. Exterior Description

1. Overall dimensions: 18,185 square feet.
2. Foundations: Concrete.
3. Wall construction: The exterior walls are concrete block and brick. The west façade is faced with brick and cast-concrete set with a light gray mortar. The north façade is painted white, and the paint is peeling. The south façade is faced with brick, except for a portion of the wall at the east end which has been in-filled with concrete and painted to match the brick facing. The storefront facades are stepped down to follow the sloping topography.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing concrete block and brick.
5. Chimneys: There is one internal brick chimney with a terra cotta lining located south and east of the stairwell, adjacent to Gene's Grocery and Deli. The flue is capped with a mesh cage.
6. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: On the west (front) façade all of the shop doorways are recessed into the façade, forming deep display windows and entry areas. A variety of door types are used: No. 1309 has double, wood panel doors, each with full vertical glazing; each is painted dark brown. The door to the south is inoperable. Nos. 1311 and 1317 have single plate-glass doors and single plate-glass windows above the transom. No. 1313 has a glazed panel door; it is painted white and the framing is red. There is a louvered vent in the transom. Nos. 1315 and 1319 have panel doors with glazing above. The opening above the transom of No. 1315 has been in-filled with plywood. Both the door and the in-fill are painted peach pink. The door of No. 1319 is painted hunter green. No. 1321 has a single plate-glass door with sidelights on the south and glazing above the transom. The area of the wall forming the entry area is detailed with cast-concrete panels with an Assyrian

design incorporating protruding circles (gray), a modified Greek key pattern (brown), and a floral motif (pink).

- b. Windows: On the west (front) façade all of the windows are plate-glass with metal trim and hardware. The trim below the display window of No. 1319 is painted blue. All of the other hardware is unpainted.

7. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: Flat, covered with asphalt.
- b. Cornice: The cornice features ribbed cast-concrete trim. Although the cornice spans the west façade in places it has been obscured by modern fabric and metal awnings that have been installed over the entryways.

C. Interior Description

1. Floor plans

- a. Cellar: There is a full cellar with access from each unit.
- b. First floor: The front door to No. 1309 opens into a large room occupying about half of the unit. A built-in counter originating at the south wall is located near the rear of this room. Two doorways in the east wall of the main room lead to two office spaces and the bathrooms in the northeast corner. In No. 1311 the door in the west (front) façade opens into a small room that is separated from the kitchen by a counter (made of wood with a Formica top) with a north-south access spanning the unit. A white Formica counter is anchored to the south wall. Access to the kitchen is through a gate at the north end of the counter. East of the kitchen are the bathrooms (northeast corner) and storage and refrigeration areas (southeast corner). At No. 1313, the door in the west (front) façade accesses one long, narrow room. The washing machines line the north wall; dryers line the south wall. A dry cleaning machine and dryer are located at the east end of the room. Two vending machines are located north of the entrance in a small alcove. Two locked doors in the north wall near the northeast corner of the unit presumably lead to bathrooms and storage areas. For No. 1315 the front door opens into a room occupying about one-third of the unit. The front (west) section of the room is used as a waiting area. A counter is north of the entrance. The back (east) section is the work area; there are mirrors on the south wall. An east-west axis hall leads to the rear (east) of the unit. Bathrooms are in the northeast corner; there is one room north of the hall, two rooms to

the south. In No. 1317, the door in the west (front) façade opens into a large room filled with sales fixtures; shelves line the north and south walls. An L-shaped counter occupies the northwest corner of the room. A refrigerator unit with windows housing the deli section is located at the rear (east) of this room. Storage areas are on the south wall behind a partition separating the stock room from the sales floor. Bathrooms are in the northeast corner. No. 1319 has a door in the west (front) façade that opens into a large room. A hall on an east-west axis leads to the rear of the unit. There are several small rooms located off of the hall; bathrooms occupy the northeast corner. In No. 1321 the entry accesses the dining room. An island topped with a planter is located about 10' east of the door. The kitchen is located in the southeast corner of the unit. A small hall with an east-west axis leads to the bathrooms in the northeast corner of the unit.

2. Stairways: Each unit has straight-run concrete stairs that access the cellar.
3. Flooring: Concrete throughout. In No. 1309 there is a wall-to-wall indoor-outdoor carpet over the concrete. In Nos. 1311, 1313, and 1321, there is linoleum tile over the concrete. In No. 1315 the front (west) section of the front room has carpet over the concrete while the remaining floors feature linoleum tiling.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: In No. 1309 the plastered walls are covered with paper; the ceiling is white acoustical tile. In No. 1311, in the sales area, the walls are covered with pine paneling, which is also used on the ceiling of the display window south of the door in the west (front) façade. The rest of the ceiling is white acoustical tile. The walls in the kitchen are covered with white tiles. In No. 1313 the north wall, above the washing machines, is covered with pegboard painted white. All of the other walls and the ceiling are plaster painted white. An enclosure for plumbing made of fake wood paneling attached to wood framing runs along the south wall above the tops of the dryers. In No. 1315 in the main room, the plastered walls are painted peach; the other walls are white. Partitions are plasterboard over framing. Ceilings throughout are white acoustical tile. In No. 1319 the walls and ceiling are plaster painted white. In No. 1321 the walls of the dining room and halls feature pine paneling. The ceiling is dropped acoustical tile.
5. Doorways and doors: In No. 1309 the doorways feature flat wood trim; doors are glazed panel. In Nos. 1311 and 1315 the doorways are plain; there are panel doors throughout. In No. 1313 the doorway in the north wall features plain wood trim; in the north partition, no trim; doors are paneled. In No. 1319 all of the doorways have plain wood trim painted green; the doors are panel throughout. In No. 1321 the doorways have flat wood trim that matches paneling in the dining rooms; all doors are panel.

6. Decorative features: In No. 1311 there is a central ceiling fan in the waiting area at the west end. In No. 1313 the baseboard along the south wall is painted brown. In No. 1319 the chair rail in the main room is painted green.
7. Lighting fixtures: In Nos. 1309 and 1311 the fluorescent fixtures are flush with the ceiling. In No. 1313 the fluorescent fixtures run the full length of the unit. In No. 1319 a fluorescent fixture spans the south wall of the main room. In No. 1321 the fluorescent fixtures in the ceiling are flush with the acoustical tile in which they are set. Half-dome shaped aluminum incandescent fixtures are mounted on the walls of the dining room.
8. Heating: Oil furnace.

D. Site

1. General setting: The shopping center is located on the east side of North Court House Road between North 14th Street and North 13th Street. Behind it is a fourteen-story apartment complex, and to the north is a mid-rise office building. The shopping center is banked on a steep hill and thus has a diagonal, rather than horizontal, appearance.
2. Landscaping: There is none. A narrow paved lot with angled parking spaces and a sidewalk align with the front of the building. More parking spaces and the trash dumpsters are located at the south end; a concrete retaining wall topped with a chain-link fence encloses the east end of this parking area. The east (rear) façade faces a seemingly inaccessible alley.

PART III. Sources of Information

A. Historic Photographs: None have been located.

B. Selected Sources:

Primary and unpublished sources:

Arlington County Land Records (Deeds, etc.), Office of the Clerk of the Court.

Building Permit Index Card files, Arlington County Planning Office.

Real Estate Assessment Records, Arlington County Planning Office.

Published Sources:

Goode, James. *Best Addresses*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1988.

Hill's Arlington County (Virginia) Directory. Richmond: Hill Directory Company, 1955.

Mesrobian, Caroline Isabelle. "A Selection of the Architectural Oeuvre of Mihran Mesrobian: Beaux Arts Architect, Washington, DC." M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1978.

C. Illustrations

Figure 1. View of the shopping center showing the central tower, alley, and pilaster detail at Nos. 1317 and 1319 North Court House Road. The photograph was taken by John C. Schwartz in April 1990.

